

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 044 700

AL 002 677

AUTHOR Rees, Alun L. W.
 TITLE Training the EFL Teacher--An Illustrated Commentary.
 PUB DATE Jun 70
 NOTE 11p.; Reprint
 AVAILABLE FROM Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, Depto. de Idiomas y Linguistica, Trujillo, Peru, (\$6.00 subscription, 4 issues yearly)
 JOURNAL CIT Lenguaje y Ciencias: v36 Jun 1970
 EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.65
 DESCRIPTORS Educational Objectives, *English (Second Language), *Language Instruction, Linguistic Theory, *Teacher Education, *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Despite current interest in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, there is still cause for dissatisfaction with the training of EFL teachers, both in Britain and abroad. The author presents, in the form of a "duologue," some pertinent views from a variety of sources, and stresses the need for a more realistic approach to teacher-training. A training course is regarded here as inadequate if it does not embrace ample training and guidance in such "bread-and-butter" matters as class discipline, blackboard presentation, conducting oral and group work, planning and correcting homework, arranging extramural activities, overseeing exercise books and various projects, making visual aids and using them, handling film-projectors, and advice on dealing with specific teaching items. Above all, the teacher must be shown how to plan his work so that he is able to conserve his vital energy. The trainee should not be developed as a future textbook writer; his valuable training time should not be consumed by the "barren practice of note-taking"; his training should be based on seminars or discussion groups rather than lectures. Even the tradition of the demonstration class should be re-examined. The discipline of linguistics should not be confused with the art of language teaching. Emphasis on linguistic theory can be justified only if it conduces to successful classroom practice. (AMM)

Alun L. W. Rees

Training the EFL Teacher--An Illustrated Commentary

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION
& WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR
ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF
VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECES-
SARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDU-
CATION POSITION OR POLICY

Despite current interest in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, there is still cause for a good deal of dissatisfaction with the training of EFL teachers, both in Britain and abroad. In the following duologue, our imaginary protagonist and deuteragonist--Alwyn Preece and Justin Davenport--bring together some pertinent views on this subject gleaned from a variety of sources. Davenport obligingly serves as a foil for the presentation of Preece's remarks which consist, in the main, of an anthology of quotations compiled to express, expand, bolster and lend authority to his own views.

As in any created dialogue, from the Platonic to the Shavian, the drift of the conversation is contrived by the author for his own purposes, but it is hoped that the reader will not therefore assume that Preece is tilting at any but the real windmills arising from Davenport's provocative contribution and his aim in this imaginary world is clearly that he might by opposing end them.

ALWYN PREECE: Recent advances in linguistics and psychological theories have certainly caused some unrest in the teaching profession. The language teacher who tries to keep abreast nowadays is perforce left somewhat bewildered by the flux and change of progress. Wardhaugh sums it up when he writes:

A reading of the recent history of teaching English to speakers of other languages and of many of the recent books and articles on specific pedagogical issues will alert the reader to the fact that the present state of the art may be characterized by the word uncertainty. This uncertainty arises from the current ferment in those disciplines which underlie second language teaching: linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy. The uncertainty is also reflected in teacher training and in those materials which are being produced for classroom use.

JUSTIN DAVENPORT: The language teacher might well sympathize with the student at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton who was quoted as saying on leaving a seminar:

"Wonderful! Everything we knew about pshyics last week isn't true!"²

¹ Ronald Wardhaugh. "Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: The State of the Art." ERIC Clearinghouse for Linguistics, Aug 1969 ED 030119

² Referred to in the introductory chapter of : Martin Gardner, Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science. New York: Dover Publications, 1957, p.10

ED044700

AL 002 677

PREECE: The changes have not been all that radical, you know. Valdman³ makes this very point when he describes what a Rip Van Winkle would find on awaking from a sleep begun in the earlier part of this century:

Chances are that our newly awakened colleague would not feel particularly out of place in most of the FL classrooms he would visit. To be sure, he would gaze in awed wonder at the language labs and some of the portable gadgets that deans, principals and district superintendents would proudly display to him. But our colleague transported three decades into the future would discover that the true primary objectives of FL teachers are still today those that they were in the 1930's: the ability to understand literary texts and to compose grammatically correct sentences. The more immediate objectives of teachers are still to cover the assigned text in the allotted time. Textbooks, in turn, attempt to treat all the principal grammatical features of the language and to expose the student to an extensive vocabulary so that he will be suitably prepared for various comprehensive examinations, for it is on the basis of the students' performance in these examinations that the teacher's competence and the efficiency of the teaching programme are determined. Our visitor would also be pleased to note that the instruction is still teacher-directed, even when students temporarily vacate a classroom for the language laboratory. Instruction still proceeds in lockstep fashion; not only do all students progress through material at the same rate but they are also expected to demonstrate parallel acquisition of proficiency in all skills, for it would not occur to most present-day teachers that a given student might have a comprehension knowledge of, say, Lesson Six, but a speaking control of Lesson Four. Next to the teacher, the textbook is the primary teaching component; the material recorded on the tapes or discs simply contains part of the material printed in the book. Finally, the instructional process is determined by the teacher's (or the textbook author's) conception of how a second language is learned in the formal classroom situation rather than by the student's own behavior.

I might add, too, that question-and-answer sessions still provide the core of language lessons; many of the old drills have returned in new guise, such as the transformation of active statements to the passive voice.

DAVENPORT: Perhaps so. But you may be somewhat misled by the inevitable time-lag between new theories and their practical realization. I am convinced we are due for a revolution in language teaching--it may even have begun already.

PREECE: Your claim begs certain amplification, but at least it gives the lie to discontent with the present state of affairs. Far-reaching changes are still needed, and nowhere are they more urgently required than in teacher-training centres both in Britain and abroad. Much of what is offered by these establishments is largely irrelevant to the needs of the future teacher. I fully agree with Banathy⁴ when she asserts that:

With very few exceptions, current statements of objectives for teacher education usually denote the out-of-class, rather than the in-class performance of the teacher.

³Albert Valdman, "Toward a Better Implementation of the Audio-Lingual Approach"
⁴Bela H. Banathy, "The Design of Foreign Language Teacher Education." Modern Language Journal, Vol. III, No. 8, Dec. 1968

DAVENPORT: Are you implying that future teachers are being overtrained?

PREECE: Not exactly; you seem to have missed the point. Our priorities are off-balance. Trainees are persistently instructed in the wrong aspects insofar as the types of training bear little relation to subsequent practices. Just glance through a current edition of the booklet on academic courses in Great Britain relevant to the teaching of English as a second language⁷ and you will gain some idea what I mean. Considerable attention is paid to the theoretical underpinnings at the expense of the more relevant practical aspects of classroom teaching. Valdman⁶ makes a similar plea for a readjustment of emphasis when he reminds us that:

While no efficient teaching of language first and letters second is possible without them, the concentration on the inanimate and external components of foreign language instruction has diverted attention from its more fundamental components: time, the role of the teacher, the nature of the foreign language learning process, and--oh yes--the student.

DAVENPORT: Then you would contend that, generally speaking, TEFL training is neglecting the essentials?

PREECE: What I am concerned with is a more realistic approach to teacher-training. Our sights must not be set too high. Many such courses may last no more than one academic year, which leaves little enough time for even a modicum of the practical work related to real, not ideal conditions, which should surely be acknowledged as a priority. No teaching course can be regarded as adequate if it does not embrace ample training and guidance in such bread-and-butter matters as: class discipline, black-board presentation, conducting oral and group work, planning and correcting homework, arranging extra-mural activities, ensuring that pupils set out their exercise books properly, engaging them on various projects, making visual aids and using them in actual contexts, handling film-projectors, as well as advice on dealing with specific teaching items, for example, new structures, reading, dictation, comprehension, dialogues, spelling, handwriting, and so on. Above all, the teacher must be shown how to plan his work so that he is able to conserve his vital energy. If the teacher were slavishly to follow the recommendations doled out in many teaching courses at present, his strength would be so taxed that his useful working life would be reduced to about 5 years!

DAVENPORT: But with the time shortage in training, would not a theoretical orientation serve the teacher better as a guideline in adapting his methods to his own teaching situation? An abstract approach is more flexible because it is less committed than a mainly practical one.

PREECE: A paltry defence for present deficiencies which, by the way, are not confined to TEFL training. Stuffing the learner with theory merely invites regurgitation--it is no substitute for real training. Holbrook⁷ speaks for us all when, referring to the preparation of English teachers

⁷David Holbrook. *The Exploring Word: Creative Disciplines in the Education of Teachers of English*. Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 28

for native speakers of the language, he asserts:

Yet while these essential disciplines are neglected student teachers are spending weary hours at lectures on "psychology," "education," "aims and methods," and "English lit.," taking useless notes, which they put aside until the time comes to be examined on them. They simply practise their training in flanneling examiners. Even the assumption behind such work is wrong--that by "knowing" a few facts, theories and precepts intellectually, a teacher can direct his work in a living context subsequently, by conscious application of the tenets of "reason." The assumptions behind such instruction are that the relationship between "knowledge" and living is direct and simple, whereas there is only a confused and complex relationship as I have suggested between people's intellectual knowledge and their inward dynamics.

I have always felt that too many courses of initial training mistakenly assume that the trainee is raw material waiting to be developed as a future textbook writer. Although this may impress authorities and even the trainee himself, it is entirely unrealistic. Few teachers have the skill or time for textbook writing. If we are frank with ourselves we will realize that even the injunction to prepare individual classes regularly and thoroughly is crying for the moon; with a timetable of 5 hours a day, 5 days a week as a minimum, together with the correction of homework, the teacher is too overburdened to entertain the fulfillment of this chore. How many of our trainees will ever be prepared to dedicate all their waking hours to the profession? The most we can reasonably expect is the ability to select an appropriate text or, of greater importance, to adapt and interpret an unsatisfactory one. For even an outmoded text is better than no text at all--it will at least form a basis for the novice teacher's adaptations, and serve as a rough check on his progress. Despite the obvious drawbacks entailed in putting all our eggs in one basket, training centres abroad might well break with tradition by directing their work to the handling of a specific set of texts available locally, instead of dealing in vague generalities. We cannot hope for originality or resource from the inexperienced teacher unless he is provided with some practical basis on which to build, no matter how unsound.

DAVENPORT: But what is behind all this? Why should teacher-training be so often wide of the mark?

PREECE: Largely because it has been dogged by the bugbear of academic respectability. Very many training centres are attached to university departments of education. To retain status in an academic world, training has become dominated by things theoretical, with a mere dash of practical work thrown in as a sop for dissenters. It is the examination which frequently looms large in this training. Let me quote further from Holbrook's penetrating study; so much of what he describes is symptomatic of our own ills:

Such disastrous consequences of the examination system come because they are based on an essential pretence--that students are capable of much more than they are really capable of. It is syllabus which has the prestige, not the needs of the young growing person.

⁸David Holbrook. Op. cit., p. 89.

You know, there is something falsely reassuring about the starkly printed syllabus. We delight in finding what is essentially amorphous material being neatly tied up in handy bundles; it engenders a comforting sense of power over the subject matter, and a sense of completeness, too. The sweeping claims and enticing promises of the syllabus are such stuff as the dreams of educational bodies are made on.

DAVENPORT: Yes, but we must somehow systematize the process of teacher-training.

PREECE: Indeed, but in doing so we should force ourselves to undertake some fundamental rethinking. Holbrook's suggestions provide an admirable starting point. Here is some more of his sound advice:

We can, certainly, ask some fundamental questions about the content of education courses. How much, for instance, do lectures on psychology, the history, aims and methods of education, and the rest, contribute to the student teacher's capacities? As an educational experience in themselves, cannot such lectures sometimes be irrelevant and even a bad influence? They imply by example that the teaching process is more "objective" than it ever really can be--and that education is taking in, taking notes. Such questions have as yet hardly begun to be asked.

He later affirms this conviction when he writes of a woman trainee:

Of course, some of her discoveries could only be made through experience. But is it her education which to some extent misled her, in encouraging her to suppose that in her relationship with children her reactions ever could be "rational" or even "consistent." Or that situations in real life--whether in teaching or not--could ever be met by "calm, rational thinking," or by "being philosophical." A classroom situation, like a critical family situation, comes suddenly upon one, and one has to live through it, from hand to mouth, relying upon one's intuitive powers (as a mother does with a baby). This is not what many lectures on the theories of education and psychology imply.¹⁰

DAVENPORT: I recall Roethke¹¹ revealing a similar sentiment in one of his lectures:

Great teachers are not necessarily systematic thinkers. The very act of teaching is against this.

For teaching is one of the central mysteries, in spite of its great body of unessential lore, its professors of silly procedure, the assemblers of material looser than newspaper.

⁹ & ¹⁰ David Holbrook. Op. cit., pp. 10 & 29.

¹¹ Theodore Roethke. Mentioned in: "Profiles of American Authors," English Teaching Forum, No. 3, May-June 1969, U.S. Information Agency.

I must admit that I have always suspected the efficacy of the lecture method for trainee teachers. It is a vestige from the days when there were not enough books to go round.

PREECE: Worse still, it is an anachronism from the time when there were no books at all! Advances in programmed learning have positively shown us the ineffectiveness of a teaching method which mistakenly presupposes that the learner can be, and already has been, trained to learn through subjection to hourly chunks of information, with no arrangement for immediate feedback. Lecturing, and a lot of what passes for teaching in schools too, is not teaching at all, but a cumbersome form of intelligence test in which the listener is not taught, though he is expected to learn. I am in complete agreement with the Cambridge polymath, Eduardo de Bono's view of education, summed up by his motto: "No-one has to listen." As far as teacher-training is concerned, I would dogmatically state that what is contained in appropriate texts, set out clearly and concisely, should remain there. The student may be directed to it if necessary, but valuable class-time should not be consumed by the barren practice of note-taking. Of more immediate import is practical guidance based on the fruits of the tutor's classroom experience--providing, of course, that he boasts such experience!

DAVENPORT: But lectures convey what cannot be found in textbooks.

PREECE: Possibly. Yet so often they represent no more than variations on a theme. However, my main objection is that as a device for training the teacher, the lecture is worthless.

DAVENPORT: Surely, lectures embody some advantages too?

PREECE: Yes, they do, if you mean that they avoid the self-effacement involved in direct participation with our students. Lecturing about skills rather than being engaged in their inculcation is playing safe. It is much easier to talk about teaching than to demonstrate it, just as there is more effort required in equipping learners with a fluent command of a language than in plying them with descriptive facts about it.

The lecture system, too, helps cope with the problem of staffing institutions. By an unfortunate paradox, progression within the teaching profession all too often leads out of it and into administration. The experienced and successful teachers who are in such short demand are replaced by lecturers. You know, there is a great deal of truth in the old dictum that those who are interested in their subject become lecturers, and those who are interested in teaching become teachers. Yet university teacher-training schemes in Britain still maintain preference for accepting the honors graduate, the more academically inclined. There are so many quite intellectually mediocre people who are naturally endowed with the knack of teaching just anything they know. Some of the most effective EFL teachers I have seen never even entered upon sixth-form work during their schooldays.

DAVENPORT: And some of the worst teachers I have encountered also fall in this category.

PREECE: Which proves that academic prowess is not a reliable guide to success as a teacher. Many of us recall from our schooldays the erudite master who bored us to tears. There is a great deal of plain intellectual snobbery involved in selecting those we wish to train as teachers, although it is

abundantly clear that school teaching is not an academic profession. In some ways it is a pity that we have to be educated adults, who have presumably put away childish things before we are launched on our teaching careers. Few of us retain the Dickensian capacity to project ourselves imaginatively into the child's shoes--a very necessary quality for the teacher to possess. What a humbling and salutary experience it would be if we were all periodically placed at the receiving end of instruction by being subjected to the learning of an unfamiliar tongue!

DAVENPORT: Tell me then: If you had free rein, how would you redesign the training of the EFL teacher?

PEERCE: Well, that is a broad topic which I can treat only summarily today. I am inclined to believe that a Cartesian rejection of all preconceived notions might be in order as a preliminary step. We would thus ask ourselves some basic questions, such as whether a mother bird ever taught a fledgeling to fly by an extensive course in aerodynamics, or whether the Olympic sprinter is trained to run by a series of lectures on the physiology of muscular co-ordination.

DAVENPORT: These trite comparisons are odious! I have heard and read ever so many such crude and ingenuous analogies in recent years.

PREECE: Yet they are odoriferous to the long-suffering trainee! They highlight the fundamental difference between competence and performance--knowledge of a skill on one hand, and practical ability in that skill on the other. Once we have established this important distinction, then we can proceed to a consideration of teacher-training based on common sense. I might remind you that though a child may be able to recite by heart the few moves involved in mounting and riding a bicycle, this offers us no assurance that he will not tumble on his first clumsy attempts to do so. Let me quote Banathy¹² again:

...if we systematically observe what the foreign language teacher actually is to do in the foreign language class, and if we describe this performance in specific terms, then we have a valid line of departure for building a programme which will eventually lead to the attainment of the kind of performance desired or described.

Holbrook¹³ offers a basically identical appeal:

What I shall suggest here is a syllabus based on experience--based essentially on work with children and the observation of children followed by seminars with those who have shared these experiences, who have had a little more experience of life, and who know a little more than the student.

Training should be based on seminars; these discussion groups would preclude lectures. In fact, as suggested by Holbrook, training demands centring on the classroom. The best way to learn anything is to do it. There ought to be little discrepancy between the way the trainee is trained and the way he will be eventually expected to teach. The example of good teaching tends to generate good teachers. Furthermore, particularly in the foreign institution, the candidate should be regarded as a future teacher from the day he embarks upon his course of training--the art of teaching is not something to be foisted on him in his final year or in odd moments of teaching practice; it requires a more consistent and continuous process. This is exactly what Holbrook¹⁴

¹²Bela Banathy. Op. cit.

¹³ & ¹⁴David Holbrook. Op. cit., pp. 10 & 29.

recommends when he writes:

So one considerable change which seems to me urgently needed is for the student teacher to have much more experience, early in his course, of teaching children--and then afterwards, instead of lectures, to have real seminars, to discuss the nature of children (and of Man) from the experience of the classroom...

DAVENPORT: And what about the demonstration class? Where would this fit into your scheme of things?

PREECE: I was expecting that to crop up sooner or later. You tend to be much more conservative than I am. Call me an iconoclast, if you will, but I am convinced that even the tradition of the demonstration class calls for reconsideration. Unless it reveals daily progress by comprising a series of demonstrations on consecutive days, with a class the demonstrator knows well, then such an isolated performance tends to be converted into either a spectacular showpiece or an embarrassing farce--both displays being uncharacteristic of what is suited to the normal classroom.

DAVENPORT: Well, though I may indeed be somewhat conservative, I cannot but endorse your opinion. The same might be argued of the deplorable practice of submitting the hapless trainee to the inquisition of delivering a final class before an examiner. This is still a feature of many training programmes which I would otherwise regard as progressive. Obviously, it encourages an unrepresentative exhibition, but my main objection is that it suggests that each class is a self-contained entity, part of an end-to-end progression that is somehow complete in itself, whereas teaching entails much more fluid progress. This has at least been tacitly acknowledged by the fashionable division of language material into teaching units, as opposed to the old rigid lessons which, one suspects, were formulated by consulting a grammatical description of the language and then dividing it into convenient bits to fit in with the school timetable, with little regard for pedagogical considerations. Classes should overlap and merge naturally into one another. I remember reading in one of Palmer's books ¹⁵ some interesting technical advice for undertaking this overlapping.

PREECE: Yes, of course. How ridiculous to allow the trainee's fate to hang on one solitary class, and especially when so many human factors are involved! Some kind of continuous evaluation over an extended period is clearly the only justifiable form of assessment.

Bright ¹⁶ puts forward a valid criticism on these lines similar to mine:

For students to watch good teaching, for them to be exposed to the infection of excellence is necessary, but the effectiveness of a good demonstration is easy to exaggerate. Students see that it is easy and do not appreciate why. The art conceals the art, which is excellent for teaching pupils, but the art of teacher-training is not to conceal it but reveal it.

¹⁵ H.E. Palmer. English Through Actions. Longmans, 1969

¹⁶ & ¹⁷ J.A. Bright. "The Training of Teachers of English as a Second Language in Africa." In: Teachers of English as a Second Language. Ed., G.E. Perren, Cambridge University Press, 1968.

DAVENPORT: Teaching is indeed an art; much more of an art than a science. But at what point would you reveal the art by presenting the theory behind the practice?

PREECE: This is a crucial question, and one which Bright¹⁷ himself refers to:

...the problem of relating theory to practice is central to the training of teachers. It cannot, in my view, be solved by presenting the theory and demonstrating the practice, but only by involving the students in the process of applying the theory to particular teaching situations.

I would proceed one stage further in upholding that if we can instill the skill without the concomitant theory--and to a large extent this is possible--then the theory loses its justification, and may even become a hindrance when there is limited training time.

The centipede was happy quite
Until a toad in fun
Said, "Pray, which leg goes after which?"
That worked her mind to such a pitch
She lay distracted in a dithc,
Considering how to run.

As far as teacher-training is concerned, theory can be justified only if it conduces to successful classroom practice.

DAVENPORT: Would you also deny rigorous theoretical work on the foreign trainee's English? Surely Fries¹⁸ was near the mark when he wrote:

It is not enough for the foreign language teacher to be able to speak English. To be most effective he should know English--its sound system, its structural system, and its vocabulary--from the point of view of a descriptive analysis in accord with modern linguistic science.

PREECE: It is easy to overestimate the command of English required by the EFL teacher in a foreign environment. Though admittedly praiseworthy it is not at all essential for him to be fully conversant with up-to-date grammatical descriptions of the language, nor to be able to hold his own in discussions on economic or political affairs, or on a variety of social occasions. A vocabulary of not more than 3,000 words is adequate for beginner's classes. Let us not forget that the teaching will be based on a particular text, and if the teacher is merely able to impart the language skills on which it is based, he will at least have achieved a limited but secure foundation in the language for his pupils. Although in the ideal situation we should by all means ensure that the trainee is offered wider understanding and experience than the minimum required for teaching the secondary-school pupil, this broader educational aim is superfluous if he is not thoroughly equipped to transmit what is needed by the learners. This is not to deny that in the foreign training-centre serious attention should be paid to the trainee's English. In this respect he boasts a certain advantage over his English-speaking counter-part, for he approaches the language through the learner's eyes. As I mentioned before, good teaching here may be reflected in his own performance later. However, in many lengthy

¹⁸C.C. Fries. Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964, p. 2 of the Preface.

training programmes abroad it is regrettably taken for granted that mere exposure to the language will augment and consolidate the learner's command of it. This opens the door for a spate of work on English history, culture, government, and so on, which is largely irrelevant.

DAVENPORT: Irrelevant? This kind of instruction offers a solid contribution to the trainee's general education.

PREECE: Only last week I noted the following topics proposed for inclusion in a three-day in-service course for local English teachers: "British and American English," "The British Education System," "The Learning Process and Teaching Methods," This brings us back again to the all-important question of priorities. Although I would once have agreed with you on the value to the future English teacher of such courses,¹⁹ subsequent experience in the field has proved me wrong. In few secondary schools will the teacher be called upon to conduct lessons on these superfluous themes. They are peripheral, factual studies which should not replace continuous courses in a training centre, devoted solely to improving the trainee's skill in the language. They may be admitted as supplementary material at a late stage in the language learning process, though we must not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that they are effective media for language acquisition.

Your quotation from Fries rests on another fallacy, too. The discipline of linguistics should not be confused with the art of language teaching. A linguistic description of a language has nothing to do with teaching it. In many ways linguistics has usurped the unproductive grammar grind that once blighted language learning. The phoenix has been rejuvenated with a more colourful plumage. Its increasing influence on language teaching is not so much the fault of the linguist himself as of those in search of a panacea for language learning ills.

DAVENPORT: I take your point. But this teacher-training business is much more complex than you would admit. Let me cite Lamendella:²⁰

The primary goal of the language teacher is to instill in the student abilities in the production and comprehension of the target language which are comparable to those of the native speaker. Before adequate methods of language pedagogy can be developed, textbook writers and teachers will have to have access to a theory of human language acquisition and an understanding of the psychological representation of linguistic knowledge in the mind. Anything less puts the teacher in the position of merely presenting the data to the students in a hit and miss fashion with no principal basis to deciding what it is that should be taught, the order of presentation, or how to give adequate explanations.

¹⁹ See: Alun L. W. Rees: "Presenting the History of the English Language to the TEFL Trainee" in: Ideas for the Foreign Language Teacher. Trujillo, Peru: National University of Trujillo, Dept. of Languages and Linguistics, Jan. 1970.

²⁰ John T. Lamendella. "On the Irrelevance of Transformational Grammar to Second Language Pedagogy." Language Learning, Vol. XIX, Nos. 3&4. Dec. 1969

PREECE: Obviously, my alarm at the current blind espousal of linguistics has led me to overstate my case. My view is more soberly contained in what the same author writes immediately before and after the extract you have just referred to:

...it is a mistake to look to transformational grammar or any other theory of linguistic description to provide the theoretical basis for either second language pedagogy or a theory of language acquisition. That is, what is needed in the field of language teaching are not applied linguists but rather applied psychologists.

...Moreover, theories of linguistic description are relevant to language teaching only to the extent that they form part of the data which psycholinguists may use in constructing a cognitive theory of language. It is this theory which may be properly utilized as the theoretical basis for second language pedagogy.

We must be cautious about pinning our faith on every new and possibly evanescent fashion. Already the Skinnerian, behaviourist view of language has been shown to be one-dimensional and incomplete; it could never satisfactorily explain for me the process behind the learner's formation of completely new utterances. As Reibel²¹ points out:

But the learner's proficiency in the target language, like that of the native speaker, is not just the linear, additive sum of all the language parts he knows. It is the function of his skills in using those parts to express himself appropriately, to say what he wants to without effort. But skill in use, as I conceive of it here, is not a grammatical parameter, it is the speaker's ability to make appropriate use of his knowledge of the grammatical form of his language...Thus his learning is more exponential than linear.

Emphasis tends now to have shifted from preoccupation with teaching, towards a study of learning. Current research into the child's acquisition of his mother-tongue might bear some fruitful results for foreign language learning, although there are not grounds for our being overly enthusiastic. Apart from the different psychological and physiological considerations involved in first and second language learning, there is no guarantee that the unique way the child masters the elements of his language is in fact the best way for him to have assimilated it.

DAVENPORT: Well, you have convinced me of one thing at least: of the uncertainty in our field that you mentioned earlier. Clearly, the via-media of eclecticism is our safest refuge as an interim reconciliatory measure, vague and impressionistic though it may be.

PREECE: Yes, that seems a sensible solution. My only plea is that a strong breath of common sense might also be felt where it is long overdue-- in the training of the EFL teacher.

²¹David A. Reibel. "Language Learning Analysis." IRAL, Vol. VII, No. 4, Nov. 1969